

Letter from Westminster

Stranger danger lessons

ONE-hundred-and-fifty years ago this August, eight year-old Fanny Adams was playing with her sister in their home town of Alton when a man approached them with money for sweets.

Fanny, as is well known, was then abducted and murdered and Frederick Baker was subsequently hanged in Winchester for her murder; one of the last public executions in the city.

When I was at school, 'stranger danger' was drilled into us and the memory of the public information films of the time still send shivers down my spine.

These days, the message is essentially the same but it's much more complicated because of the dangers posed by the internet.

As a dad of young children, the issue of their safety online is personal. Of course the internet is a good thing but there are real dangers, not only for adults with various phishing scams and identity fraud, but also for our children.

Recently, I teamed up with Parent Zone and Google to lead an assembly at Merdon Junior School in Chandler's Ford. The 'Internet Legends' event was an online safety initiative that aims to teach primary school children practical tips for staying safe.

The session is based around four 'pillars', Think Before You Share, Protect Your Stuff, Check It's For Real (so much fake news around now) and Respect Each Other.

For adults, this is common sense, but those who wish to use the internet for dark reasons are extremely clever about it, and more tech-savvy than the best of us.

This early engagement is absolutely crucial to keep our little ones safe from the modern stranger danger but also to ensure childish mistakes don't ruin lives. I often remind young people that anything posted to the web is there, somewhere, forever. Certainly, Facebook is one of the first places I look when someone applies to work for me.

One frightening element to all this is the secret acronyms teenagers can use online which keep us parents in the dark. Must admit I did not know '99' means parents have stopped watching and left the room, 'WTTP' asks if you want to trade pictures and, most chillingly of all, (L)MIRL is taken from the title of the rather good Deftones song meaning let's meet in real life. Ones to note.

You can find out more and see pictures from our time at Merdon via www.stevebrine.com/internetlegends